Interview with Lul Mohamud of BU’s Islamic Society Executive Board

*On why ISIS appears to be winning on social media…*

ISIS preys on the fear of the marginalized students, youth, and minorities—creating the false sense of security, hope, and brotherhood that these minorities lacked in their home country, the place they were supposed to feel safest. Refugees come to America after being targeted and victimized in their own homes, looking for a safe space. Yet they come to America and are treated the exact way in the place that was supposed to be safest for them. Most perpetrators felt this once, and were once subjected to ISIS recruitment over social media. Ironically, portrayal of Muslims on American social media is what drives these minorities and “recruits” to ISIS in the first place, as they wouldn’t feel the need to find “acceptance” and “brotherhood” online if they hadn’t felt rejected from American society in the first place.

*On why efforts to counter ISIS have been unsuccessful…*

The government is fighting this battle as they have fought wars before, however the modern-day war is on a screen, not a battleground. Understanding this is the foremost important part to understanding how to halt ISIS recruitment and attacks. Lul also emphasizes that the lack of education on Islam versus radical Islam has a great deal to do with unsuccessful counter initiatives. “We have to make sure that we know who the real enemy is, because it is very blurred. People don’t know who or what ISIS is. ISIS is not the Muslim family living down your street. ISIS is a larger group hiding behind a screen that could be stopped but unfortunately people aren’t looking there… I would suggest that they [the US counter initiatives] focus more on protecting those who are marginalized, and educating those who don’t know who ISIS is who the real enemy is.”

*On the groups susceptible to ISIS influence…*

Young men and women of minority background are the main target of ISIS recruiters. To Lul, this is because Islam is seen as the enemy, because people associate Islam with Radial Islam, even though true Islam is a religion based on peace.

*On education…*

Education is the only way to begin to make a change and beat the cycle that causes radical Islam and terrorism. We need to talk to the people who “don’t know what a Muslim is, who may not know what Islam is, that it is one of the largest religions in the world, one of the oldest in the world. We need to be teaching them and talking to them and letting them know that the more you discriminate against a Muslim, the more you are supporting ISIS inadvertently…” Along with educating all people, Lul stresses that it is imperative to understand a person before you speak to them on the topic at hand. “There are specific ways to to talk to people. Teaching others how to communicate effectively and in a way that will stimulate conversation and not a lecture is most important. Open their minds and get them to start talking. The way you get there for different people though is so different. It needs to be catered towards each person. That comes with the patience to communicate effectively and with the awareness. Empathy.”